

Healthy Leadership 5: Who Is the Leader!

Exodus 3:1-15

The Pathway to Healthy Leadership: Studies in Exodus on Moses as Leader

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Sunday, October 7, 2007

Worship at 9:15 and 11 a.m.

We listen to the Word of God from Exodus chapter 3, verses one to fifteen:

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked and the bush was blazing, but yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses. Moses." And he said, "Here I am." Then God said, "Come no closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt. I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of the land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has come now to me. I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" And God said, "I will be with you. And this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, ye shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'I Am' has sent me to you."

God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The God, the Lord of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations."

This is the Word of the Lord. Let us pray. Now, Almighty God, may you speak your Word to us as you have spoken in ages past. May you touch the curiosity of our minds, the hunger of our hearts—that we might know who you are. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In 1978, the British rock band "The Who" released their two-time platinum album, *Who Are You?* with the title track song, "Who Are You?" which was written by the lead guitarist, Pete Townsend. While the song is infamous for its language, Townsend wrote that the song had a spiritual point in his own life. The question: "Who are you? Who?" "Who?" is directed at God, according to Townsend, reflecting a subtle reference to the Egyptian ancient name for God, "Who"—the God of creation. I believe that each one of us asks that question at some point in our life: 'Who are you, God? I really want to know. Tell me who you are, 'cause I really want to know.' Each of us come to the place in our lives where we, in order to have a sense of future and a sense of call as to what we are to do in life, come to the place of wanting to know that God is with us. And we want to know who God is, who sends us out to do work in the world. Today, in celebration of World Communion, we are asking the question: In this world, who is leading? Who is in charge? Who has a plan? Who will make things right? Who will decide what is right and wrong? Who is the leader of the nations? Who is God?

The answer that Moses receives is: Yes—Who is leading. Who is in charge. Who does have a plan. Who will decide what is right and wrong. Who will make things right; and Who is the leader of the nations. Who—in fact is God. This is not double-talk. This is the core of the understanding that Israel had of the very nature of God—for all leadership, and all follower-ship, and all times and places. When Moses is wandering in the desert and he's leading his flocks, he comes in contact with a moment of curiosity—the burning bush. (Oh, I was tempted to take that little moment of metaphor, in light of our current administration, and try to draw some connections. But I decided not to.) God leads Moses. God meets Moses there. God has taken the initiative. God gives the call to Moses. God starts the conversation. And the conversation goes on for a period of time. It is God who first catches our attention; God calls us by name; and God knows us before we even know who God is. God calls us, as his people, to take responsibility to lead. Healthy leadership is founded in the very nature of who God is. God calls us to listen... to engage... and to converse... in conversations with him. This is one of the reasons why our officers—our Elders—have called for a Day of Prayer from October 19th to the 20th — 24 hours to listen to God, and to hear God's call for us as a congregation. Not to be doing the talking, but to be asking the questions and to be doing the listening.

Who is God? We see, in this little text, some of the very essence of who God is. God cares about people who are in pain—particularly people who are oppressed and in misery. God sees the misery of his people. God does not turn away; God is very much aware. God hears their cry. God knows their suffering. And that knowledge of God, in their suffering, is as if God were participating right there in their midst, joining them in their pain. God comes down to deliver. God brings them up and out of Egypt to a better place—because God has seen their oppression, and God sends human leadership to intervene. At the heart of leadership is this question of "call." And at the heart of the question of "call" is: Who you do you know God to be? A God who chooses a people... a God who calls a leader... a God who invites that leader into a partnership... a God who appears unexpectedly and unusually... a God who catches our attention. It's not so much that we catch God's attention; it's that God catches our attention, and God calls us by name.

God enters into the conversation with Moses. And God is having a conversation with you today. You can only know, yourself, what those questions and responses have been, from God. For God has probably been recruiting you to do something; persuading you, and convincing you, even in the midst of your questions and your doubts. God calls Moses. And Moses responds, "Here I am." God

commissions him: "I will send you." But Moses hesitates, "Well, who am I?" And God commits, "I will be with you." But Moses hesitates again, and says, "Who are you? God reveals: "I Am Who I Am." God calls us in the midst of our doubts and questions; and the key question that we ask is: Who are you, God?

We have seen a lot recently about Mother Teresa— this saint of God who healed so many people in the midst of their dying, their hunger, and their loneliness. But to read her own letters of struggle—of wondering who God is, and where God is in her life— is very poignant. She wrote, "Lord, my God, who am I, that you should forsake me, the child of your love? And now became as the one most hated; the one that you have thrown away as unwanted and unloved? I call, I cling, I want... and there is no one to answer; no one on whom I can cling. No. No one. I'm alone." Even Mother Teresa had a deep sense of disconnect with the God who had called her to serve the poor. There is nothing wrong in your life if you have heard the call of God and there are significant times when you feel disconnected—when you have questions to ask... you have hesitations to overcome... and you challenge God to give you an answer. Sometimes, like Mother Teresa, you don't receive an answer. God calls us to live in the reality of the existence of who God is—not with the sense of our own feeling about God.

The key question, "Who are you?" engages the mystery of God, when God says, "I Am Who I Am." What kind of a name is that? The question is not about: What shall I do?...or, Why should I go?... or, How shall I lead?... or even, Where shall I go? The core question of leadership is: Who are you, God? If a leader has not asked, and had that question answered, then the leadership is probably going to be poverty-stricken from the very beginning. God's answer, "I Am Who I Am" is a powerful statement about the very breath of God breathing life into human beings. For the words that are "to be," in Hebrew, are breathing words: "I Am." Ehyeh. "I Am Who I Am." Ehyeh aser ehyeh. And the very name "Yahweh" is a breathing name— the word "to be"— He Is. Who is God? The One who Is. The One who breathes life into all living things. The One who speaks before anyone speaks. The One who calls before anyone is called.

We see God was clearly in the life of Jesus, who asked the disciples one day on Caesarea Philippi, "Who do people say that I am?" And they said, "Well, some say Elijah; some say John the Baptist; some say another prophet." But Jesus gets more personal and says, "But who do you say that I am?" Of course, Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." I know who you are— you are the One who is 'I Am.' I believe that that hunger on each of our parts—when we are called to lead— we are first called to know who God is. Coming back to Pete Townsend, in his poetry of "Who are you?" the song was based upon an experience that he had personally when he woke up drunk one morning, after a bad day and night. The song goes: "I woke up in Soho doorway; policeman knew my name. He said, 'Go and sleep at home tonight if you can get up and walk away.' I staggered back to the Underground and the breeze blew back my hair. I remember throwing punches around and preaching from my chair. I stretched back and I hiccupped; and I looked back on my busy day: eleven hours in the Tin Pan... God—there's got to be another way." And then Townsend slips into his understanding of God: "I know there's a place that you walked, where love falls from the trees. My heart is like a broken cup. I only feel right on my knees." Who are you? He is experiencing the God who is seeking him out. The real question is: whether Townsend is willing to listen and go where God calls. My sense is that's still unresolved in his life. He ends his song with: "Yet still receive your kiss. How can I measure up to anyone now, after such a love as this?"

What Moses experienced there in the desert was not just a call to go do something; it was the very presence of the God who would be with him while he was going. The beginning of healthy leadership is for us, as leaders, to know the healthy presence of God. And that God comes to us before we reach out to God. In our hunger for God, God meets us. God shows us a blessing as a kiss; love, in spite of our own temptation to self-destruct. We ask the question, "How can we measure up?" And we finally get the answer: that we cannot possibly measure up; and that's okay. "Who am I," Moses said, "that you would send me to Pharaoh?" And God answers the question: "I will be with you. Moses, you have your flaws... you have your doubts... you have your questions... you have your concerns... but that is not significant because I Am with you." Leaders need to know that there is the Highest Power that has called them to lead. Jesus said, when confronted by the Jewish leaders of his day, "Who are you?" And he answered with a very powerful statement: "Before Abraham was, I Am." They were so shocked and taken aback that they took up stones to kill him; but he disappeared. Jesus claims to be the One who was there with Moses at the burning bush: "I Am Who I Am." Before any great leaders of the world...before all the great leaders of the world... Jesus declares: "I am the Light of the World." "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." "I am the Resurrection and the Life." "I am the Bread of Life." So on this World Communion Day, as leaders and servants of God, when we ask this question, "Who are you?" we come to this table and we see Jesus saying, "I Am. I am the Bread of Life."

My wife and I, today, have been married 35 years; today is our 35th anniversary. When we got engaged, we thought about what was happening in our relationship and we thought about Scripture and about who Jesus is in our lives. We came up with an agreed-upon statement that we put on the front of our wedding bulletin; it is a quotation from Colossians chapter 1, verse 27: "It is Christ in us, who is the hope of glory." For Christ is the One who breathed life into our relationship. Christ is the One who breathes life into our leadership; and Christ is the One who breathes life into all that we do. Are you willing to trust, in spite of all your doubts, that God is who God says he is? "I Am Who I Am. Now go."

Let us pray. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, we now go; but in going, we first come to your table. We come to your table to receive the Bread of Life that you provide for us. We ask that you would fill us in such a way with your breath and bread—with your body and with your blood—that we would have the nourishment to go. Now that we know who you are, may you show us who you have made us to become. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.